

MYSTIC SEAPORT'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY MERCHANT MARINE DIGITAL LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT: This collection funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is a digital repository of over 120,000 pages of material available online. The project centers on merchant vessels of the nineteenth century, the people who owned and sailed them, and the records pertaining to them. Merchant ships were the backbone of the American economy and culture through the nineteenth century. They carried supplies, building materials, trade goods, and luxury items to and from ports throughout the country and the globe, and they brought millions of immigrants to this country. America's contact with the rest of the world, prior to transoceanic cable, was primarily maintained via the merchant marine. Merchant traders established cities, opened frontiers, negotiated alliances, and distributed ideas, culture, and technology. This presentation will concentrate on all aspects of the project from funding to scanning to presentation.

The G.W Blunt White Library is located at Mystic Seaport Museum. Our library consists primarily of a:

- Maritime History Collection made up of:
- 75,000 books
- 1,000,000 pieces of archival material
- 10,000 maps and charts
- 700 sound recordings
- 800 journal titles, 400 of which are current

This paper will discuss our process in putting together this and other digital projects, then demonstrate them a bit.

Once we thought of creating an online collection we needed to find funding in light of our status as a private not-for-profit institution. Based upon earlier projects, we had to determine our methods of creating images and text, and finally put it all together for display purposes on the web.

Because we had recently won a spot in the Library of Congress' American Memory project for a digital collection we had done on *American Westward Expansion by Sea*, we had an advantage over the competition for money in this area. We went to the Andrew W.

Mellon Foundation with a proposal to scan over 100,000 pages to create the *19th Cent. Merchant Marine Digital Library*. They liked the proposal enough to give us \$385,000 to create it. This gave us our start.

Once we had the promise of the money, we hired a team of four to work with existing staff on the project to scan and transcribe materials. Using such equipment as overhead book scanners (to protect book bindings) and flatbed scanners we proceeded to create images of logbooks, diaries, collections of letters, etc. It would take us three years, but we would more than accomplish what we set out to do. (See <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/mymhihtml/mybuild.html> for a more complete explanation of our digitizing process.)

Unfortunately, the overhead scanners only produced black and white images, but since this was really an access grant rather than a preservation grant per se, we were thrilled with the idea of not ruining our materials in the process of making them accessible.

The presentation illustrated a logbook page from the 1830s in black and white along with the transcribed form of that page that showed that the date and latitude and longitude have been inserted in a standardized format to make searching of the data easier. The transcriptions that were done are keyword searchable. We also used OCR software to transcribe published, typewritten materials to make them searchable as well.

It became obvious to us that just making the materials available through a stand-alone web site was not enough. That was sufficient for people browsing through our material, but our researchers and students come with preconceived ideas and the ability to use our catalog and finding aids for archival materials. So, we made sure that every bibliographic entity that was scanned was accessible through a link in our catalog, and if it was part of a manuscript collection that it was available through a link from its EAD finding aid. Our catalog is Voyager from Endeavor Information Systems. Voyager has made linking to our digital content manageable. We are embarking on a project to utilize another Endeavor product, ENCompass, to help us link our Museum object database with our Library catalog to give users the ability to search easily across both for a single search result set.

The Finding Aids are for people exploring particular collections. Take for instance a collection of papers of a Capt. Kermit and his sons covering their business and voyages over a seventy year period. You can go to the EAD finding aid, find the box and folder of information you want, and then link directly to it if we have created the images. (<http://www.mysticseaport.org/library/manuscripts/coll/coll068/coll068.cfm>) You can also get to this source through the card catalog. Everything goes back to standardized records and logical signposts. The use of MARC records, EAD and TEI help to keep the digital content consistent on the site.

Our web presentation pages are produced more for those people visiting our site who just want to see what we have, or for students trying to get an idea for a paper, rather than for

the serious researcher who will be using the catalog or the finding aids. Here you'll find bibliographies, timelines, pre-digested articles, etc. This has some useful tools, but it is mostly a piece to advertise the content.

(<http://www.mysticseaport.org/library/exhibits/mellon.cfm>)

Our ship register project consists of approximately 50,000 pages of published registers covering the period 1857 to 1900. These are very important books for people researching American ships. This digital collection is the only full run in existence and we did it by borrowing from multiple sources. We also have an online volunteer corps of over 30 people indexing it with now over 1,000,000 record entries. The entire list will be available in the coming year.

(<http://www.mysticseaport.org/library/initiative/ShipRegisterList.cfm>)

Our next step in our digital projects is to begin pulling other maritime-related libraries into the fold and help them to give access not only to digital materials but to the records of their original materials so that research in this subject area can become easier for the student and scholar of maritime history.

